

FREE EXHIBITIONS OF ART FOR THE PEOPLE.

RECENTLY in our metropolis works of art have been offered to the gaze of the public free of charge, in a few edifices, that thus may be said to illustrate the pictorial genius of the age. That such free exhibitions exercise very powerful influences upon the taste of the community, and are, on this account, very desirable and necessary, we do not think will be questioned. We may express a hope, however, that they may become, by every possible means that can be adopted for their success, a great attraction. If the proprietors and managers of them persevere in popularizing art in its varied departments, which doubtless they will do, provided they only receive sufficient encouragement,—if they secure, as assuredly they deserve, patronage from quarters whence it is expected to flow,—if they render them worthy of frequent observation,—their tendency to refine the masses and educate them in art, will indubitably, before long, be every where and by every body acknowledged: the ultimate effect will be a universal understanding of its powers and its principles. It is more especially the large halls, containing the productions of different artists, open free of expense to all who seek to derive pleasure and profit from their contemplation, which we consider to be such a great boon to society. Facility to an examination of these works is every thing, for thus inducement is held out to the multitude; inclination to visit them as often as opportunity offers, increases with the gratification; and a familiarity with, and pleasure in looking upon, the most beautiful things, are safeguards against many vices.

The proprietors of these halls themselves may be reminded that the beneficial results which spring from them will be in proportion to the merit and moral impression of the works exhibited. The more excellent they are, the more they display those qualities which the great masters inculcated,—the more will they be calculated to convey a perfect knowledge of art. We advocate, therefore, or recommend, the adoption of these free exhibitions for the people. Let them be multiplied. Let one or more be established in every city and provincial town throughout the kingdom. We would suggest the value, the immeasurable good, of giving gratuitous lectures on the pure and simple elements of art, so as to form and assist the judgment of those ignorant of, or who are not yet conversant with, matters to which their attention is directed. F. LUSH.

CLERKENWELL GRAVEYARDS AND THE FLEET DITCH.

WITH reference to a recent letter in your journal, on "Graveyards in Clerkenwell," from the surveyor of the district, recommending that 2 feet of concrete should be placed over them, permit me to say that the chutychards of Clerkenwell being several feet above the public ways, this would, if covered with concrete, force all pernicious exudations through the walls of the churchyards, and thereby occasion more danger to the public than by permitting them to pass off unrestrained. Can it be necessary still to say, that the best way of remedying the abomination is to cease hurrying in the churchyards of all towns and crowded neighbourhoods? *Prevention will be found better than cure.*

While addressing you upon the all-absorbing subject of the present time, may I urge upon the Commissioners of Sewers a little more caution, at this unhealthy season, in causing drains to be opened and cesspools emptied. I know of several instances where the inhabitants were quite well until the drains were disturbed; why not wait for a cooler temperature? It is also to be regretted that the Commissioners of Sewers do not practise their experiments, or gain their experience in some out-of-the-way place, such as the Isle of Dogs, instead of poisoning the metropolis; any of your readers who have been obliged to move about the streets recently will no doubt bear witness to the necessity of these remarks.

When the weather becomes cooler some careful steps must be taken to render the Fleet ditch (if it cannot be covered) more bearable. I ask anybody to go down Bowling-street, and enter the houses on the west side, and it will

be observed that the flow of water does not touch the sides, upon which the excrements are left, with fish, vegetables, &c., to decompose and fill the atmosphere with poisonous vapours. I was asked a few days ago if there were any odours from a dust-yard just opened in Castle-street, Clerkenwell? The question, however, cannot be readily answered; it is exactly similar to striking all the notes of a piano at once, and then inquiring as to the tone of any one note. You are no doubt aware of the various smells in this locality from the different occupations on the borders of the Fleet ditch.

In conclusion, I request your attention to the reservoirs belonging to the New River Company in Claremont-square and St. John's-street-road, which are above the public ways, and you will observe that the water is exuding through the walls, and that in one instance the walls are bulged.

W. P. GRIFFITH.

A WORD FOR THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

NOT being a constant reader of THE BUILDER, the letter of a "Passed Student," dated August 11, only accidentally came to my knowledge. It does not require much phrenological science to perceive how differently minds are constructed. I am, like your correspondent, a "passed student," but my feelings towards the Royal Academy are feelings of unminged gratitude. For ten years I enjoyed all the advantages of that institution, without one sixpence cost. The great and glorious statues of the Greek sculptors were always exposed for my study; living models were provided and prepared to my hand; paintings by the first masters, from which the principles and practice of the art are to be learnt, were annually placed before me. In addition, the library, where are to be found prints from every school, as well as treatises on art in every language, was always at my unlimited command. During these ten years I was free to the annual exhibition. In all this time, though a careful and thoughtful student, I was not successful in obtaining one of the many medals proposed to the school as tests of progress. Leaving the Academy, I spent some time on the continent of Europe, and at my return I applied to the council to be readmitted to the advantages of the schools: my former course being known, this favour was readily granted, with the notice that the application must be made annually, as the council could only renew the permission for one year. To me, an annual letter seemed no great tax. I now became an exhibitor, and so obtained free admission to the exhibition; and, Sir, if in any season I sent no picture, so far from considering the payment of a shilling a hardship, I contributed it with a feeling of pride, in the idea that I could add my mite to that treasury from whose accumulated mites I had derived such incalculable advantage.

Your correspondent says, "he has no hostility against the academy." It would be strange indeed if he had; but he seems to think the funds not properly appropriated. All other exhibiting societies divide the profits amongst the members, but the members of the Royal Academy share nothing. All the funds are produced by shillings received at the door (certainly the public have a shilling's worth for their shilling), and these funds are expended on the schools. The fabled pelican of the wilderness plucks its own breast for the support of its young. The Royal Academy spends the funds procured by its own exertions in raising up students, who are to become the rivals of its members, and who are to take the bread from their mouths. A reserved fund is, therefore, necessary to save the institution from the contingency of diminution in the annual receipts, to preserve members in their old age from penury, and to extend the hand of charity to all who have ever exhibited on the walls of the academy. Your correspondent well knows that nothing is contributed to the support of the Royal schools, by the Government, or by the Sovereign. The shilling received at the door is its all in all.

The mighty benefit to be gained by admitting what your correspondent calls "the lower public" to the exhibition, is not well made out. Those who most loudly insist on this

measure, are the men who deny to modern artists any knowledge or power (?). If then their works are so contemptible, what good are "the lower public" to derive from the exhibition. The National Gallery at next door is open to every shirtless amateur. He may there study the works of the masters in art; and on Sunday he can walk to Hampton Court and see the cartoons of Raffaele. Surely all this is much more wholesome food for his mind than what Mr. Conyngham calls "the chalky absurdities" of Eastlake, Mulready, Ety, Landseer, &c.

As you have admitted one passed student to state his feelings, you will not, I am sure, refuse the privilege to

A GRATEFUL STUDENT.

A LONDON FEVER STILL.

THE CRYPT OF BOW CHURCH.

"I have often reflected upon the unprovided condition that the body of the people were in at the first coming of this calamity upon them, and how it was for want of timely entering into measures and management, as well public as private, that all the confusions that followed were brought upon us, and that such a prodigious number of people sank in that disaster, which, if proper steps had been taken, might, Providence concurring, have been avoided, and which, if posterity think fit, they may take a caution, and warning from."—*Account of the Great Plague in London in 1665*, by DANIEL DE FOE.

It has been our lot for many years past to be more or less engaged in investigating the antiquities of London, and during these researches to explore various neighbourhoods which few persons without a particular object would think of examining. When searching for the relics of a bygone time, we have never failed to observe the condition of things of the present, and to endeavour, when occasion served, to lay such matter as seemed useful before the public. We have engraved the annexed sketch of the ancient crypt of Bow church, thinking that in the present state of the public health it would be beneficial to lay before our readers not only verbal denunciations, but a correct representation of one of the abuses which, even at the present enlightened day, is allowed to remain in this densely populated metropolis, premising that our objections are to the system, and are not intended to apply invidiously.

If it were not that powerful interests are in this matter opposed to improvement, it would be scarcely necessary to do more than place this drawing before the public, and to observe that below a large number of the London churches are similar receptacles for the dead. The fearful consequences of such a practice must surely be evident to every unprejudiced and well informed mind; but there are two classes of persons—one having a pecuniary and the other a personal interest in the continuance of intramural burials—who are difficult to convince. As to the first of these classes we will say nothing more than that their interests should be duly considered; but the feeling which dictates the wish to have our last resting place near the remains of dear relatives is a circumstance worthy of the greatest respect. Still, even this feeling ought to be quite secondary to the consideration of preserving the public health. It has been fallaciously argued that no ill effects arise from burials in vaults, in consequence of the bodies being encased in lead, and some say that they would think it a great hardship to be prevented from being placed after death among their family. Although the crypt of Bow Church is by no means the worst in London, still its atmosphere is a proof against the above assertion, and Mr. Walker and others have given evidence on the point beyond controversy. Wishing to obtain another opinion in addition to those already recorded and our own, we wrote an able surgeon and chemist to the following effect:—

"It having been stated that the practice of encasing bodies in lead previous to interment will prevent poisonous gases from being dispersed throughout the vaults in which such bodies are laid, will you inform us if you think it is possible by any such process to confine the gases which are generated by decomposition."

In reply, he said—"They would be completely confined by such cases made of lead until by their accumulation the case would no longer resist the pressure; the result would be either the sudden rupture of the case or the